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# Life & Arts

FT Weekend



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Often misread as little more than a prophet of laissez-faire, the father of modern economics would have radical remedies for 21st-century capitalism. By Jesse Norman

Capitalism in flames, populism and nationalism on the march across Europe, a US president bent on demolishing free trade, a British shadow chancellor calling openly for the overthrow of capitalism itself... the 21st century is not going to script. The market system from which global prosperity has emerged over two centuries is now under attack from all sides, its basic legitimacy assailed from the right by critics of unfair competition and crony capitalism, from the left by campaigners against inequality and "market fundamentalism".

More than any other, the Scottish political economist and philosopher Adam Smith stands at the centre of this ideological battlefield, while around him clash competing views of economics, markets and societies.

For many on the right of politics, the author of *The Wealth of Nations* is founding figure of the modern era: the greatest of all economists; an eloquent advocate of laissez-faire, free markets, the "invisible hand" and the liberty of the individual; and the staunch enemy of state intervention in a world released from the stultic delusions of communism.

For many on the left, Smith is something very different: the true source and origin of "market fundamentalism", homo economicus and the efficient market hypothesis; the prime mover of a materialist ideology that is sweeping the world and corrupting real sources of human values; an apologist for wealth and inequality and human selfishness — and a misogynist to boot.

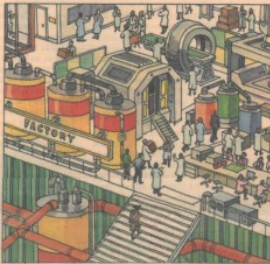
Which, then, is the real Adam Smith? In fact, both these views are hopeless caricatures. Smith was not an advocate of laissez-faire; the phrase "invisible hand" is an intellectually fertile and quotable that he offers constant temptations to over-interpretation.

Smith's ideas, and to breed myths without number. For Smith is so intellectually fertile, so multi-faceted and so quotable that he offers constant temptations to over-interpretation or outright theft. Indeed, he can be read as anticipating an astonishing range of contemporary events.

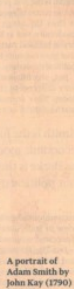
One such is the rise of celebrity politics, from the interaction of modern technology with the human disposition to admire the rich and the powerful, and the human capacity for mutual sympathy, both ideas Smith discusses in his less well-known but no less brilliant first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Another is the logic or otherwise of Britain's departure from the European Union. After all, during the war of independence, Smith argued in relation to the American colonies that Britain faced a stark choice: either to separate entirely from them, or to form an imperial union, in which case sovereignty, and in due course the seat of government itself, would end up slowly being transferred to America.

It is a small irony that Smith himself detested controversy. A man of gentle and retiring disposition, he led a life of academic uneventfulness. Born in Kirkcaldy, Fife, in 1723, he went to study first at the university of Glasgow, and then in



## Who is the real Adam Smith?



A portrait of Adam Smith by John Kay (1790)

1740 at Balliol College, Oxford — which he much disliked. One can understand why, since Balliol at that time was High Church, Tory, factional, costly and Scotophobic, and Smith was Presbyterian, Whiggish, sociable, impeccuous and a Scot. It was not a happy combination.

Smith left Oxford in 1746, and after a period at home returned to Glasgow as a professor. In 1764 he embarked on an extended tour of France as tutor to the young Duke of Buccleuch, before finally taking a position as a Commissioner of Customs for Scotland. Over 40 years he published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1790) and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), and very little else.

As to his private views, we know very little. In politics he was broadly Whiggish in his beliefs in the virtues of constitutional monarchy, religious toleration and personal freedom. But he remained remarkably close-lipped about his own political views throughout his life. He was famously absent-minded, once being so engrossed in conversation that he fell into a tanner's pit. He never married, and he had no children. As far as we know, there were no secret loves, no hidden vices, no undergraduate pranks, no adult peccadilloes when it comes to juicy personal detail. Smith's life is a featureless Sahara.

But if Smith's life was uneventful, the times he lived in were not; indeed, they were tumultuous. The Union between England and Scotland forged in 1707 was, then as now, a bitterly contested affair. But it proved to be a foundation of modern Scottish nationhood, and it set in motion a transformation that made Scotland one of the tiger economies of the 19th century.

Union opened the way for Scotland to leave feudalism behind and become what Smith calls a "commercial society", based not on personal subservience but on markets and trade. But that process was by no means preordained.

After all, in their quest to reclaim power for the Stuart monarchy, which had been dispossessed in 1688, the Jacobites repeatedly rebelled. In their last and greatest revolt, under Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745, the Jacobites came within 120 miles of London and might have taken the city had they not been tricked by false English intelligence. If they had succeeded, then — who knows?

— the entire political and religious settlement of Britain might have changed. However, Scotland's 18th-century transformation was not merely economic; it was cultural and intellectual as well, and it took the country from the edge to the centre of European thought. What is now known as the Scottish Enlightenment included a dazzling array of thinkers in philosophy, the natural sciences, law, history, and literature as well as political economy, social psychology and ethics — a generation comparable to Dr Johnson, Edmund Burke, Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick, Oliver Goldsmith and Edward Gibbon south of the border.

Smith once described the great philosopher-statesman Burke as "the only man, who, without communication, thought on economic subjects exactly as he did"; but Smith's closest friend and deepest influence was David Hume, and he and Hume — by any measure one of the greatest philosophers of all time — were at the heart of this remarkable Scottish intellectual transformation. They were an unusual pair. Hume, the older man by 12 years, was worldly, open, witty, full of small talk, bawdy and piercing epigrams, a lover of whisky, a gourmand and a flirt. Smith by contrast was reserved, private, considered and often rather austere in his public manner, although he could unwind in private.

Hume's ironic wit and humour make him a biographer's dream. After his *History of England* proved to be a tremendous critical and popular success, his publisher entreated him for another volume: only to receive the memorable rebuff: "I have four volumes for not writing: I am too old, too fat, too lazy and too rich."

When, as a last dinner before Hume's death in 1776, Smith complained of the cruelty of the world in taking him from them, Hume said: "No, no. Here am I, who have written on all sorts of subjects calculated to excite hostility, moral, political, and religious, and yet have no enemies; except, indeed, all the Whigs, all the Tories, and all the Christians."

There are many other such stories. Hume's thoroughgoing philosophical scepticism had earned him a notorious reputation as an atheist, so much so that he was turned down for academic positions at both Glasgow and Edinburgh universities, to their everlasting later tricked by false English intelligence. If they had succeeded, then — who knows?

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Arts

# The world's fair

Manifesta 12 | Tackling both regional and global concerns, the biennale's latest edition is fresh and far-reaching, writes Jackie Willschlagler

**O**n the stone façade of Palazzo Chiaramonte in Palermo, there are grooves left by the iron cages in which hung the severed heads of aristocrat rebels against Emperor Charles V. The fortified palace near the port was built in 1307 for a Sicilian lord who made his fortune collecting taxes there. Later, under Spanish rule, it became the Inquisition's *gloia*, preserved against the odds on chalky walls beneath grand arches, large-scale coloured murals and scribbles – drawings of Christ's Passion, homescik landscapes, mutterings of faith and despair – memorialising the last days of political

This is the desperately affecting context to Taiwanese artist Yehon Chang's immersive display "Poetry of Flow": expressive calligraphic scrolls of ghoulish heads, tumbling rivers, spiralling fronds, depicted in black oil with broad sheep-hair brushes on Italian bed-sheets. It is a light, respectful intervention, directing attention as much to the ancient graffiti by victims of religious extremism as to the artist's fusion of western and Chinese traditions. Chang mirrors too motifs in the Giardino Garibaldi opposite: huge banyans with exposed aerial roots, ornamental fountains, busts of Risorgimento leaders.

A **MANIFESTA**, REVEALING FROM EVERY SURFACE a history that spans millennia of global confrontations and cross-currents, is a perfect venue for Manifesta, Europe's nomadic biennale committed to political art. "The Planetary Garden", the 12th edition, launched this week, takes its title from gardener-ecologist Gilles Clément's book suggesting that we cultivate the earth, collaboratively, as "one small garden". An outstanding match between milieu and mindset, this Manifesta is fresh, varied, distinctive, responsive to regional Mediterranean crises yet concerned with subjects that touch us all.

Palermo's stumptuous gardens give a seductive sense of natural abundance. In "Theatre of the Sun", Los Angeles collective Fallen Fruit swapped a room in the decaying seaside villa Palazzo Butera with wallpaper in tropical naïve style, mapping trees in public places whose lemons, oranges and apricots are available to anyone. The stunning 18th-century Otto Botanico, boasting 12,000 exotic species, those from Africa and Asia flourishing as well as home, functions especially as a potent metaphor for thriving coexistence in this city with an ever-increasing migrant population.

At the garden's entrance, "Palermo Herbal", Malin Franzén's lovely monumental "natural prints", imitates 17th-century Sicilian botanist Paolo Boccone's method of colour-pressing specimens, juxtaposed with today's scientific visualisation techniques researching toxicity: a finely tuned layering of



Clockwise from main: Masbedo's 'Protocol no 90/6' at Manifesta 12; Evgeny Antufiev's 'When Art Became Part of the Landscape'; Fallen Fruit's 'Theatre of the Sun'; a work from the Evgeny Antufiev installation

and jigsaw, maps and models describe "Costa Sud", a devastated, contaminated stretch of southern Sicily's coast.

Unmissable is the installation "Protocol no 90/6" by Masbedo – Milan-based duo Nicolò Massazza and Jacopo Bedogni – at Sala delle Capriate, a Harry Potter-like vault housing thousands of thick, dusty, uncatalogued, centuries-old volumes, piled on open shelves, aisle after aisle. On the back wall, in looped video projection, an enormous wooden marionette with piercing eyes, bewildered expression and an electric blue suit happily bounces towards us. His thudding, clumsy hands and feet make the only sound in the silent, mysterious archive where city records arranged by time and chance have petrified into strata of paper fossils and faded ink. Can we understand history, change it, or are we its powerless puppets?

That question plays across expansive presentations in a group of semi-ruined palaces, many seldom open to the public, all so splendid and allusive that even

Palermo, revealing from every surface a history that spans millennia, is a perfect venue for Manifesta

empty they would justify visiting this Manifesta. Palazzo Ajtamiricristo, built around a courtyard of roses, fig and palm trees by a 15th-century grain trader, hosts contemporary works focused on transnational networks where everything – finance, information, fuel – is allowed to move, except people. From Algeria, Lydia Ourahmane's "The Third Choir" is a sound installation of mobile phones amplified inside Natfai oil barrels. Rayyane Tabet's "Steel Rings" replicates an American pipeline from Saudi Arabia to Lebanon; disused, it still runs across now impassable borders between Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

Palazzo Forcella De Seta, a labyrinth of Moorish rooms with mosaic inlays

and frescoes, stages two very effective investigative films, both by campaigners. The disturbing "Liquid Violence" by Forensic Oceanography, duo Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani, traces the trajectory of migrant boats abandoned off Libya, and the political strategies making the Mediterranean a death trap. "Flucht Helfer. In. Become an Escape Agent", by Germany's Peng Collective, follows Europeans returning from holidays who offer migrants lifts across borders; the video, giving voice to drivers and passengers alike, places such acts of civil disobedience in the



historic spectrum of those sliding refugees from Nazism and East Germany.

Against such straightforward, gripping documentaries, over-conceptualised politicised art often looks feeble or sanctimonious. Here weak Dutch offerings particularly – Manifesta is Dutch-led – lower quality and seriousness: "Night Soil", Melanie Bonajo's video of women cuddling animals, played to audiences on deckchairs on sea-blue carpets, is an example.

The few big-name commissions disappoint too. For "article 11", about US drones in Sicily, Tania Bruguera invited activists to make art works, to dreary effect. Kader Attia's chattering cultural analysis in the long film "The Body's Legacies. The Post Colonial Body" are infuriatingly didactic. These are perhaps inevitable flaws in any highly political biennale. Overall, as Palermo mayor Leoluca Orlando, impassioned advocate of open borders, declared at the launch, Manifesta impressively interacts with "a city in a process of constant change... yesterday capital of the ill-suffocating Mafia; today capital of... rights, peace, enterprise, mobility". The many young black men – though, as far as I saw, no black women – among the stewards at Manifesta venues are a small symbol of change, integration, hope.

Orlando spoke in the thrillingly ornate baroque Chiesa di Santa Caterina in Piazza Bellini, around which worlds old and new, east and west, converge: Norman tower, mosque, thundering docks, migrant footballers playing on a pitch by the port while, tucked away in Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo's "Mona Lisa", the crystalline "Virgin Immaculate" (1476) by local hero Antonello da Messina, holds her breath, raises a hand, and asks for a moment to think.

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past and present echoed by several of this biennale's most imaginative artists.

In "When Art Became Part of the Landscape" in the cloisters of the Archaeological Museum Antonio Salinas, Evgeny Antufiev places delicately textured wooden and terracotta grotesques, hybrid animal-human figures, moon faces, a symbolic boat and an asymmetrical model of a temple in counterpoint to Palermo's supreme collections of Greek sculptures, while also referencing funerary iconography and handcraft traditions in his native Siberia.

In Palazzo Costantino – a Renaissance masterpiece of overlapping loggias and double staircases that was requisitioned and wrecked by German troops, then abandoned after department store Rinascente took it on in the 1960s – Roberto Collova evokes another wreck: photographs taken since the 1970s, flotsam



## Sailing towards a better future

Ship of Tolerance | The Russian-born Emilia Kabakov's art project aims to heal geopolitical divisions. By Andrew Jack

**T**he Russian artist Emilia Kabakov watched in horror as a group of teenage boys she had brought together in 2005 in an isolated and fiercely traditional part of western Egypt set on younger children and grabbed the modest gifts they had just been given. She remembered a saying from the Caucasus, learnt during her upbringing in the USSR. "If a woman stands between two men who are fighting, they cannot continue," recalls the diminutive but fearless artist. "So I went in and stopped them."

The stand-off was a turning point in a project aimed at linking the local community to an international art-loving elite. It has evolved into "The Ship of Tolerance", an ambitious, expanding series of events around the world to bring together divided communities through children, using art and music.

The project has run nearly a dozen times over the past decade; recently opened in Rostock, Germany, it is set to visit Chicago, Palermo and London this year. In its appeal to children and its themes of legacy, it is of a piece with the playful oeuvre of Emilia and her husband Ilya, the Soviet-born, US-resident installation artists who had a retrospective at London's Tate Modern last year. But it has also taken on a life of its own over the years, with much of the creative effort coming from participants in the divided communities that host it.

The idea came when Emilia was invited to Siwa, a remote district on the border of Libya, in 2005, where the owner of a local hotel and other patrons backed a series of projects with world-renowned artists. She spent time in the local village school, in which boys were segregated from girls, many of whom would be married at 12 years old. Not far away was a stunning shallow salt lake in an oasis that most of the pupils had never visited.

It was a beautiful lake in the middle of nowhere, and had never been used by ships, so we decided to build one," Kabakov says. "It was a very mysterious place. For the first time I was really working by myself, although I developed

it together with Ilya; we talked on the phone every day."

She worked with the local school teacher to get the students to make paintings of a ship – an object they had never seen – which would form the sails. To construct the "Ship of Siwa" itself, she turned to David Harold, a joinery and carpentry lecturer at Manchester College of Arts and Technology with whom she had worked previously.

He in turn selected half a dozen teenage students from the UK, who travelled to the oasis to build the ship from local bamboo and reeds. "Some of them had never been out of the country," he

recalls. "I didn't choose the best carpenters. I chose the ones I thought needed to go, to see different cultures. It's something they will never forget."

The teenage Mancunians struggled to communicate, and it was the modest gifts of pencils and stickers they offered to local children that sparked the fighting. But with time, and through games, they forged links.

Two years later, Kabakov took the Ship of Tolerance to the Venice Biennale, where she worked with troubled schools with large immigrant intakes to produce the sails, with the theme of tolerance. "It's interesting to talk to small

children, who are not intimidated," she says. A Haitian girl said how important it was to internship, so no one had a different skin colour. A boy talked about giving parents the chance not to fight. "You immediately saw their particular problems," Kabakov says.

After Italy, she tried "a crazy idea" to

"The fly wants to eat the fruit, but they don't. That's tolerance"

take the Ship from Miami to Havana, to ease the tense relations between Cubans and exiles in the US. But the Florida-based émigrés fiercely criticised the project, putting pressure on the original backers to withdraw support. "It was a disaster. I had so many hateful calls. I used logic, they screamed," she shrugs.

With a new backer, the Miami ship was built, but soon dismantled after just a few showings. She had more success on the second leg in Cuba, where the Castro regime authorised the project. Kabakov recruited her daughter Viola and they organised an event bringing

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